

# 2023 Men's College World Series

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**Anthony Holman**

**Craig Keilitz**

**John Cohen**

State of Baseball News Conference



State of Collegiate Baseball

THE MODERATOR: This is the State of Baseball news conference, our annual conversation with John Cohen, the head of the Baseball Committee this year; Anthony Holman, the director -- the managing director of championships for the NCAA; and, of course, Craig Keilitz, the executive director of the ABCA.

John, give us an overview on what baseball is to you.

JOHN COHEN: Well, first of all, I am very proud of the field of 64 that we had. I think it's been a great tournament so far. I love where college baseball is.

I think it's still a sport where runners are being moved over. The bunt still matters. Situational baseball still matters. I think the fans recognize that, and it's just been fun to watch that during the tournament.

The strategy of the game itself is a beautiful thing. We're seeing that over and over again in this tournament.

So really thrilled to be here in Omaha with the field of eight that we have remaining, and hoping for great weather. Again, excited about this opportunity for the sport of baseball.

THE MODERATOR: Anthony, please.

ANTHONY HOLMAN: So John obviously knows and so does Craig far more about baseball than I, so I leave the selection of the teams and those things to them.

My role is really thinking big picture about the sport, about our championship, and building alliances in different places. We're pretty excited about some of the things that we've been able to do this year.

This is the second year of the -- I won't call it -- I guess it is a change in the format, but a reverting back to the format with the starting play on Friday. That was very -- went over very well last year with great attendance and our broadcast numbers were up, and we're seeing similar things. We're doing some additional things in the area with our broadcast and with the coverage and our cameras and things like that.

We're mic'ing the umpires and we've expanded video review. A number of things that we're pretty excited about.

We've built some really good alliances with our partners in baseball, who I think will probably join us in the future with this state of baseball because it's not just collegiate baseball, but we've got alliances built with Major League Baseball, USA Baseball, the National Federation of High School Associations.

We're partnering with them on initiatives around officiating, diversity and inclusion, both for players and officials and folks that work in and around baseball. I think that's important for us as well.

And trying to make the game just as engaging for the next generation as it has been for our generation.

THE MODERATOR: Craig.

CRAIG KEILITZ: This is my tenth straight College World Series and probably 15th or 16th overall. It's always an exciting time.

I think right now our baseball at this level is the highest it's ever been. The passion, the interest is just off the charts. So I feel like we're in a good position and moving forward very quickly.

The coaching has probably never been better and feel real comfortable with that. So it's just a great time to be in Omaha.

THE MODERATOR: Let's open it up for questions.



**Q. John and/or Anthony, the topic of expansion came out of the Transformation Committee. Where is that with baseball? What kind of decisions have to be made on that?**

ANTHONY HOLMAN: Yep, that was one of the recommendations for that. While that recommendation has gone forward, there's a number of moving pieces that go with that, right? The membership has to be accepting of that. We have to identify the finances of that, and does it make sense for all sports?

I think there was a real sense of that around maybe men's and women's basketball, maybe baseball as well. I think Commissioner Sankey used the example from last year's series a number of times that, hey, if Ole Miss is the last team in, does that mean we're leaving some good teams at home?

I don't know if I necessarily would look at it that way. I think it should be hard to be one of 64, and I think that maintains a really strong field and competitive balance across the board.

We serve at the pleasure of the membership. If they want to see that, I think we'll entertain it. I think there's been a little bit of a slowdown in terms of all of the transformation recommendations that were presented. There was initial August kind of timeline. Many of those things have been moved to January as our -- we've got new leadership both with President Charlie Baker as well as some members of our board that are massaging and reviewing and understanding all of those things.

So that's a long-winded way of saying there's been no action taken specific to baseball around an immediate expansion. For the near future, we'll still be at 64, but who knows what beyond '24, '25 looks like.

JOHN COHEN: I would love to see that opportunity. As part of the membership, I would love to see that opportunity present itself.

Having served on the Division I Baseball Committee, I believe that there are deserving teams that don't get in. I would love to see them get that opportunity.

As mentioned by Anthony, the membership will have to approve this and analyze it and go through a process, but I certainly think it's something that would help baseball for a variety of reasons.

I mean, when you get down to those last teams that are selected, it's really difficult because all of them are deserving, and the margin is so thin. It's an extremely

difficult task.

I can tell you this, whoever is a member of that committee, they would love to have some more at-large positions.

**Q. For John and anyone who wants to answer. Just the RPI discussion. I guess I'm curious, do you have a sense that there's much momentum for a tweak or an overhaul of that formula, and what would be the next step in some sort of RPI reform?**

JOHN COHEN: Well, we've had some great dialogue about that. My commentary about that was just simply that everything evolves. Everything. I mean, we were just talking about the potential of the field itself evolving and changing a little bit.

But, yes, I think there's a need for some adjustment. I think the RPI at its most basic form is a good thing. I think it's something that is useful to the committee. I think it's useful to baseball coaches for scheduling and things of that nature, but I would like to see it tweaked.

Much like basketball has evolved over time and several other sports. I would love to look at the potential to make some changes. Not huge, gargantuan changes, but changes that would help things like geography, things like -- many different factors.

I think one of the things that's a little disappointing to us all is we've seen a rash of cancellations of games late in the year. I would love to find a way to disincentivize that act because I don't think big picture that's the right thing to do. But right now we have a group of coaches, including our own coach at Auburn University, who there's a standard, and everyone is working within that standard. If part of that standard is to cancel a game late for RPI to help your baseball program, then there it is.

I think there are several factors that go into the RPI discussion, and I would love to see it evolve over time, but it's not a simple thing. It's not two guys sitting down and saying, hey, how about this? It's very complex and a lot of folks have to weigh in on it.

ANTHONY HOLMAN: I'll just say that I think John is right in so many ways, and his leadership has been tremendous for the committee both as a former coach, player, understands the game, the nuances of that.

I would simply add that the RPI is simply one tool in the box that the committee has. I think the RPI gets a lot of attention because it's one of the tools that's easily for folks to point to.

I would say that part of the reason it's easy to point to is because it works. Candidly, if folks will say look at the RPI, and they went right in line -- I don't know if they went right in line because there were a number of other things that the committee considers, but when they consider all those things and you put them in the field or you seed them or bracket them and you look at their RPI, oftentimes they're aligned, so that means that you are probably doing something right.

That doesn't mean that's the only thing we should be using. John mentioned our men's basketball has taken on some additional tools. We have the KPI. We're going to dig into that. That's my commitment. Staff-wise, we're going to dig into that here this summer and provide the committee with some additional items to consider for moving forward.

**Q. First of all, welcome back, Anthony, John, Craig to our home away from home here for the next 10, 12 days. Kudos to the committee. John, I know it's very difficult. We've talked before about what goes on behind the scenes in picking the field. My observation for this field, pretty interesting that we have representation from the West Coast. We have representation, two teams, from the Southwest in Oral Roberts and TCU and then three from the SEC and two from the Atlantic Coast. It came out that way. You don't know how it's going to shape up going in, but I think that's a real interesting thing. Indiana State almost got here. Oregon could have from the Pacific Northwest. Do we see a point when you select the 16 sites that there might be some neutral sites as opposed to you earn it from the regular season, that that could be tweaked? Maybe there's been some discussion about that? I don't know if that would work. Has there been some talk of going to 32 sites and adding on? There's been discussions on that to grow the game. Just throwing that out. But, again, congratulations on the hard work.**

JOHN COHEN: You want to start with that one?

ANTHONY HOLMAN: No, you can start.

JOHN COHEN: I couldn't remember the beginning of that question. Certainly in a perfect world, when you are looking at the landscape of college baseball, you would love to have representation in the four corners of this great country, but it's not one of our barometers. It's not one of our goalposts. We're choosing the 16 best teams to host regionals.

There have been some cases in the past, I know of potential two or maybe even threes that have hosted and had a one shipped into their regional.

Yeah, I think it's really evolved and common sense that ones are hosting. But, again, there's no geographic requirement. What we're told over and over again by our friends at the NCAA, Randy sitting right there and Anthony, is pick the 16 most deserving teams based on the parameters that we have as a committee. That's what we're charged with doing, and that's what we try to do.

ANTHONY HOLMAN: I'll speak a little bit to the 32 because I think that has come up, and Craig can offer as well that some coaches have thought about that.

When you add those additional things to take in mind, our broadcast coverage has been just continues to grow, and it's been tremendous. Our partners at ESPN have been amazing, but when you go from 62 to 32 sites, that's something you have to consider.

Do we still have the same type of attendance capacities that we're experiencing now when you go from 16 to 32? Those are some of the factors that have been considered and probably some of the reasons we haven't gone to 32.

The other thing that I would add -- and this is Anthony Holman speaking, not anything specifically for the committee or the NCAA, but I think it should be said. In baseball it always -- it works out, and it works out oftentimes that the top 16 are hosting.

But the teams play the season for the seed, not -- you don't automatically get the right to host, right? The seed is what you've earned.

Now, hopefully you've got capacity, your venue meets the accommodations to host, and then you are rewarded with that, but they're not one and the same.

**Q. I would be curious for anybody's thoughts on the state of power in college baseball. I think on a per-game basis it's about as high as it's ever been, but it's maybe not reflected in the way that it was in the late '90s when the balls were flying out like crazy. How do you feel like the power is in the game right now, and are there any tweaks of any kind that you guys are looking at?**

CRAIG KEILITZ: I think it's exciting. Whenever something is different, people look at it and want to analyze it and then give their thoughts if they like it or not. But it is exciting.

But I do think there's a couple little things a few years ago when COVID, we went from 5 rounds versus 40 and then cutting back from 40 to 20 over the last couple years,



rounds in the Major League draft. You are getting older kids and more experienced kids, both pitching and hitting, but also the strike zone really shaping up with the HitTrax monitoring system for the umpires, I think a tighter strike zone gets more opportunities for the hitters. I think it's a combination between those two.

Then, also, through the COVID we've gotten older players. Also, the great strength and conditioning programs that most schools now, I think all of those things play a huge part.

Another part is the nutritional aspects that the kids are getting that they probably weren't in the past and the fuel bars and things like that. I think that's made a big difference.

There's a lot of different pieces, but I think those are probably the main ones.

JOHN COHEN: I'll just say also, just to piggyback on that, strength and conditioning has been so perfected. Not only baseball, but in all collegiate sports. I remember time probably 20 years ago where somebody threw a baseball 90 miles an hour and everybody got really excited. Now, if you don't throw a baseball 90 miles an hour, everybody is disappointed.

It's really changed. So it stands to reason that when you increase velocity and you increase the strength and the size of the student-athletes who are receiving that velocity with a barrel in their hand, some dramatic things are going to continue to happen.

But I do think that, again, there's an evolutionary process to this. You will see years where home runs will go down and strike-outs will go up, velocity will go up. But, you're right, balls are traveling a great distance now.

I was just watching BP outside here. This is a big ballpark, and these kids are making it look small right now. So I think there's no question that the baseballs are flying out at record pace.

ANTHONY HOLMAN: You remember that because I'm sure there was a story in "The Herald" when we first built this joint about no home runs, so feel free to print that.

CRAIG KEILITZ: The flat seam baseball or the flatter seam baseball that we put into place a few years back has a lot to do with that, of course, and that sort of catapulted everything.

**Q. Anthony, you talked about all of the alliances and relationships at all levels of the NCAA with all the**

**baseball areas. A few years ago Kansas City and Detroit had a game here before the start of the tournament. Have you had any contacts with the people at the Major League level that was very popular, that that could happen again with whatever teams it would be, and has there ever been any feedback again on maybe having the draft coordinated within the celebrations here as well?**

ANTHONY HOLMAN: So to the first one of those, we are absolutely interested in hosting another Major League Baseball game here in conjunction on the front end or the back end of the Men's College World Series. It's probably off down the road a bit, Howard, only because MLB is doing so many of those special events.

There are many international games. They're doing the game in Iowa, Mexico City, and some other places. So we may not get our turn in the rotation until maybe the next cycle. So that's down the road a bit.

The draft we are absolutely interested in the draft being held here in Omaha in conjunction with the series, but that will not come to fruition at least until the next player agreement ends in '25 or '26.

They are committed to hosting it around the All-Star Game for right now. We absolutely are interested, and we continue to have dialogue with our friends at MLB about those types of things and combines or other types of activities that we can do in conjunction with the series here, absolutely.

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